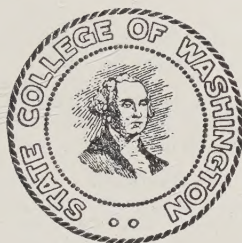


June, 1939

RESEARCH STUDIES
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Pullman, Washington

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Michigan.

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RESEARCH STUDIES of the STATE COLLEGE OF WASHINGTON

Volume VII

June, 1939

Number 2

VICTORIAN EVALUATION OF *THE RING AND THE BOOK*

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Associate Professor of English

Browning himself regarded his magnum opus as an unqualified success. "It's admirable!" he told Allingham after the publication of Volume II. "I've ever so much more to tell."¹ When Carlyle objected to the "preposterous" construction and inquired "where . . . do ye think to find the eternal harmonies in it?"² Browning went off in a huff. Before publication he refused to furnish an extract to be included in a magazine, saying, "Out of the long twenty [thousand lines] aforesaid I honestly don't think and cannot but hope, as an artist, that not a paragraph is extractable as an episode or piece complete in itself."³ He considered the early and favorable notice in the *Athenaeum* "good,"⁴ and on April 3, 1869, a month after the fourth and final volume was published, he assured Frederick Pollock that he "had at last secured the ear of the public."⁵ In later years he advised readers to begin with his masterpiece.⁶

Recent studies,⁷ however, have shown that Browning and many of his later critics have magnified the success of *The Ring and the Book*. It was a personal rather than an artistic triumph. The reviewers of 1868-69 strove in discussing his masterpiece to make amends for Browning's long neglect. The sentimental appeal of Caponsacchi, Pompilia,

¹ William Allingham, *A Diary*, ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford (London, 1908), p. 195.

² *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, I (Boston, 1913), 325.

³ Letter to E. S. Dallas in *The Letters of Robert Browning*, collected by Thomas J. Wise, ed. Thurman L. Hood (New Haven, 1933), p. 128.

⁴ Allingham, *op. cit.*, p. 195. The *Athenaeum* reviewed Volume I December 26, 1868.

⁵ *The Personal Remembrances of Sir Frederick Pollock*, II (London, 1887), p. 202.

⁶ W. H. Griffin and H. C. Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning* (New York, 1910), p. 228.

⁷ See my article, "Browning and the Victorian Public in 1868-69," *Research Studies*, V (December, 1937), 193-203. Mrs. Helen P. Pettigrew has also studied the reception of the poem; her article, "The Early Vogue of 'The Ring and the Book,'" *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, CLXIX (April, 1936), 36-47, enumerates critical judgments from reviews, diaries, and letters between 1868 and 1890.

and the Pope aided the early critics to overlook or excuse the unusually frank treatment of adultery. Passing on to the more strictly artistic claims of the poem, however, the reviewers were more objective—and more sceptical. Their reasoning is still of interest on many points; taken together, the contemporary reviews represent a more thorough and illuminating analysis of *The Ring and the Book* than most subsequent critics have offered. We find comment on its form and subject matter (its aim, that is, in literary terms); on the style and elaboration; on the success of the character studies; and on the “message.” As the months went by, each critic tried to say something that had not been said before, and the opinions overlap, digress, and vary in combination so as to make exact, complete summary impossible. Views on several topics, however, may be brought together so that their representativeness is beyond reasonable doubt.

First of all, there was a strong appreciation that, whatever its faults, *The Ring and the Book* was “real”; that it was, in some sense, “modern” and relative to the age. The basic appeal of the material is perhaps most clearly stated in the *North American Review* (July, 1869):

No incident in private life excites such general and prolonged interest as a murder. The first reports of the affair are eagerly read; contradictory facts and versions of facts are added every day; exaggerations, too gross for newspapers, are current in conversation and increase the popular ferment Whatever the testimony, some will doubt the guilt, and some the innocence of the prisoner. . . . Let the victim be a woman, young, beautiful, and a mother; let a handsome young man be mixed up in the matter, as her friend and possible lover; let the murderer be the elderly husband; let the parties belong to high life; and let their relations be long talked about,—then are present the conditions of tragic interest. . . .⁸

In its review of the first volume of the poem the *Athenaeum* testified to Browning's alert use of his material:

Everywhere there is life, sense, motion—the flash of real faces, the warmth of real breath. We have glimpses of all the strange elements which went to make up Roman society of those times.⁹

There was some disappointment that the subject was Italian. “Poetry, like charity, should begin at home,” grumbled the *British Quarterly Review* (March, 1869).¹⁰ *Tinsley's Magazine* (January, 1869, admonished: “If Mr. Browning had studied England and English

⁸ CIX, 281.

⁹ No. 2148 (December 26, 1868) p. 876. By Robert Buchanan.

¹⁰ XLIX, 441.

character as faithfully and successfully as he has studied Italy and Italian character, his position as an English poet would have been other than it now is."¹¹ The *North British Review* (October, 1869), which felt that the subject had attracted Browning because it was Italian, comforted its readers: "But if he goes to Italy and studies there, he paints Italian subjects in the Dutch manner, and is most attracted by the deposits of Teuton admixture in the strata of the Italian mind."¹²

Though set in seventeenth-century Italy, the story had been treated in a modern, even journalistic, manner. The *Saturday Review* (December 26, 1868) admitted that the poem (the first three books) had no more consecutiveness than an actual trial, and that many things were repeated:

Still, in spite of the prolongation and intricacy, the result is attained that the reader does in the end know and understand the plot; the sense of conflicting evidence, and of the different movements of the popular mind, is vividly given; and when we come to close the volume [including the first four books] we are anxious to know how the real fact will develop itself out of the maze of conjecture and inconsistency.¹³

Writing in *Macmillan's Magazine* (January, 1869), John Addington Symonds likewise defended the plan of the poem:

We are content to peruse the facts and pleadings of the modern law-case; why should we not bring the same freshness of interest to bear upon this tragedy, not stripped, as happens in newspapers, of its poetry, but invested with all the splendours of a powerful imagination, while retaining the reality of incidents and details that bear a crime of yesterday home to the hearts of everyone.¹⁴

Analyzing the whole work, however, the *British Quarterly Review* (March, 1869) was rather contemptuous of this journalistic quality:

to give eight versions of the same story, yet nowhere to tell the story in its true and direct form, is of course original, but it is certainly inartistic. It is the newspaper in blank verse.¹⁵

¹¹ III, 666.

¹² LI, 120. As subsequent quotations show, this was one of the ablest reviews the poem received.

¹³ XXVI, 833.

¹⁴ XIX, 262. A recently published letter throws some light on this rather favorable review. Writing to Henry Sidgwick, January 13, 1869, Symonds says: "'The Ring and the Book' improves. The 2nd Vol. is infinitely best. What you say about the Preface spoiling one for the rest—just as you taste some nasty thing all through the good wines and meats that succeed in a banquet—is so true that I had the greatest difficulty in trying to do my duty of faithfully appreciating the volume." *The Letters and Papers of J. A. Symonds*, ed. Horatio F. Brown (New York, 1923), p. 32.

¹⁵ XLIX, 456-57.

The *North British Review* (October, 1869) was more tolerant:

Mr. Browning's poem is a cousin-german to a series of newspaper articles. His "horrid murder" is not led up to, hidden, and discovered, as in a novel, but bursts upon us like an announcement in a journal. Its interest lies not in the sensational atrocity or pathos, but in its ambiguous character,—the various interpretations which may be given to the acts and motives of the murderer, his wife, her parents, and her friend. And these are just the qualities which would make it fit material for the journalist. . . . Half-Rome might be the summary of the articles and correspondence of the daily Liberal journal on the subject, "the other Half-Rome" a similar digest of a Tory paper, while the "Tertium Quid" would be the acrid and impartial distribution of universal condemnation administered by a weekly journal reviewing these perturbations of the world from a region of sweetness and light. . . . Here the aggregates of men simply record their sentiments through the mouth of an average member.¹⁶

In most of these comments there was apparent an open-mindedness and good humor which must do some credit to the literary public as well as to the reviewers themselves. Nevertheless, the parallels between the poem and a trial, or a newspaper account of one, suggested an impartiality and objectivity which many were quick to see did not exist in *The Ring and the Book*. Certainly Browning himself was omnipresent, as the *Spectator* (December 12, 1868) noted:

He overflows, as he always overflows, in intellectual point, in acute comment, in quaint illustration. . . . we never lose sight of the critical eye of the poet himself, who discriminates all these different shades of thought, and tosses them off with a sharpness of outline, and sometimes a touch of intellectual caricature, often a sharp sarcasm, that could only proceed from one outside it like himself. . . .¹⁷

The *Athenaeum* (December 26, 1868) agreed:

we get Mr. Browning masquing under so many disguises, never quite hiding his identity, and generally most delicious, indeed, when the disguise is most transparent.¹⁸

Again, the *British Quarterly Review* (March, 1869) said: "He throws himself with marvelous skill into many characters, but he never forgets himself."¹⁹ The *North British Review* (October, 1869) spoke of the Pope's monologue as a particularly fine example of this utterance of the poet's ideas behind the mask of his character.²⁰ Less flatteringly, *Saint*

¹⁶ LI, 117.

¹⁷ XLI, 1465.

¹⁸ No. 2148, p. 875.

¹⁹ XLIX, 457.

²⁰ LI, 123-24.

Paul's (January, 1871) summed the matter up: "The speakers here differ from one another in various important respects; but they are all alike in one thing: their excessive love of talk."²¹ A brilliant wit has led astray a weak artistic conscience: that, says *Saint Paul's*, is the explanation.

Three journals accused the poet of loading the scales in favor of "the right," in spite of his protestations to the contrary. The *Spectator* (January 30, 1869) inquired: "... is not the truth too exclusively on one side to justify the manifold aspect in which it is the plan of the book to delineate it?"²² The *Saturday Review* (April 3, 1869) felt that Browning assumes rather than conclusively demonstrates the portentous guilt of Guido.²³ *Cornhill* (February, 1869) was much more emphatic:

It is not that the poet's own sentiments about the story and his sympathy with certain of its personages are to be detected in the workmanship, whereas they should never show at all, but that he begins by open declaration of them. . . . The dramatist should have no more judgment about the character he displays and the passion he depicts than nature herself who first created them. He should never play the commentator; still less should he take sides and explain his reasons for doing so before the play begins.²⁴

Tinsley's Magazine (January, 1869) felt that the poet "kept himself in hand" in giving various points of view regarding the events of the action.²⁵ The *Athenaeum* (March 20, 1869), after attributing to Browning various Shakespearean virtues, conceded that the poem is not objective. This, however, is not a fault:

. . . it contains, even in some of its superbest passages, a certain infusion of what Mr. Matthew Arnold once called "criticism." So far from this "criticism" being a blot upon the book, it is one of the finest qualities as a modern product. . . . The work is the more truly worthy to take Shakespearean rank because it contains certain qualities which are quite un-Shakespearean—which, in fact, reflect beautifully the latest reflections of a critical mind on mysterious modern phenomena.²⁶

Such sophistry could not prevent others from asking the question—so central in any consideration of Browning's work—why, with dramatic material and dramatic method, did he fail to produce a drama?

²¹ VII, 377. Signed "E.J.H."

²² XLII, 141. After the final installment the *Spectator* raised the point again, March 13, 1869 (XLII, 325).

²³ XXVII, 461.

²⁴ XIX, 254-55.

²⁵ III, 673.

²⁶ No. 2160, p. 400.

Few were satisfied to say with J. A. Symonds in *Macmillan's Magazine* (January, 1869): "ours is not a dramatic age. We want to get behind the scenes."²⁷ The *Spectator* (December 12, 1868) referred to the poet as always "semi-dramatic."²⁸ The *Athenaeum* (December 26, 1868), in spite of its enthusiastic praise, admitted that "the 'monologue' even when perfectly done, can never rival the 'scene.'"²⁹ The *Spectator* (March 12, 1869) indicated why: "In a story told, like this, in long semi-dramatic reaches, where the reader is closeted, as it were, with each character for a couple of hours at a stretch, there is far less room for the use of an artistic foil, than in a proper drama, where the action and reaction of the secondary characters on the principals are rapid and effective."³⁰ The *British Quarterly Review* (March, 1869) concluded that Browning is "not a dramatist, but he is a consummate actor."³¹ Less politely, *Fraser's Magazine* (November, 1869) closed its review: "So the play ends, a dramatic poem in twelve acts, which might be effectively reduced to the five of legitimate drama."³² In all these comments we are aware of a sense of disappointment, an uneasy feeling that in *The Ring and the Book* subject and form had not been ideally harmonized.

Several more general remarks reflect this disappointment. "Is this indeed worth while?" inquired *Putnam's Magazine* (June, 1869); but whether worth while or not, the reviewer admitted that no one else could do it so well.³³ More caustically, the *Dublin Review* (July, 1869) averred: "Few English poets, worthy of the name, that ever lived seem to have cultivated so little the *art* of poetical composition."³⁴ Some unflattering comparisons were proposed by the *North American Review*:

Nothing could be more unlike the incidents which Homer delights in than this story. If he had it to tell, he would tell it straightforwardly, in part by narration, in part by dialogue . . . with such an interest as a healthy man takes in healthy men. Shakespeare would make out of the subject a second Othello . . . A didactic purpose would be absent in Homer, present but not obtruded in Shakespeare. . . . Browning is conscious, like Lucretius, of a didactic purpose, not indeed speculative, but ethical and religious.³⁵

²⁷ XIX, 258.

²⁸ XLI, 1465.

²⁹ No. 2148, p. 875.

³⁰ XLII, 324.

³¹ XLIX, 437.

³² LXXX, 678. Signed "Shirley," pseudonym of Dr. John Skelton.

³³ N.S., III, 755.

³⁴ LXV, 50.

³⁵ CIX, 282-83.

This idea that Browning had a personal bias in shaping his material, and was thus cut off from achieving the objective expression required by drama, was further supported by the *North American Review* (October, 1869). We read that Browning's discovery of the Old Yellow Book was "whimsically providential" in supplying the plot: "All that he could not do he found ready to hand; all that he could do best, he saw room for." The result is a hybrid, for the monologues are dramatic, narrative, and lyric; "the story is a good one for a man who can put together last speeches."³⁶

Most reviewers accepted the poem as a striking novelty. *Cornhill* (February, 1869) remarked, "Everybody has heard by this time what the plan is of this wonderful story, and knows how original and how daring was the attempt."³⁷ This opinion was not universal. The *Nation* (February 18, 1869) refused to be amazed:

Over and over, and over again, till the crime and the revelations of the parties to it, and their own and others' opinions of it, have been looked at from every point of view, Mr. Browning intends, he says, to tell the story. This, it will be seen, is but an expansion of his familiar method.³⁸

The reviewer then went on to describe "The Glove" as an example of "the familiar method." The *North American Review* (July, 1869), perhaps influenced by the *Nation*, thought that the poem, "though in scope a literary novelty, is not essentially a novelty in plan," and drew parallels between *The Ring and the Book* and "Bishop Blougram's Apology," as well as "The Glove."³⁹ The *North British Review* (October, 1869) found the new poem "both in plot and in the characters, a renewal of old productions," particularly "The Flight of the Duchess":

In both there is the child-wife, great in moral nature and in possibilities of development, but ignorant, innocent, and unformed; in both the icy, formal, heartless husband; in both the "gaunt grey nightmare" of the mother-in-law; in both a deliverer whose presence is like a flash of light to the pining wife, transfiguring her to a daring heroine. . . . In both there is a censor who relates the story, and delivers his judgment upon the motives and acts of the persons.

The unusual length of the poem naturally invited comment, and there was little disposition to temper the winds of displeasure. Reviewing the first volume, *Macmillan's Magazine* (January, 1869) said frankly

³⁶ LI, 113-23, *passim*.

³⁷ XIX, 253.

³⁸ VIII, 135.

³⁹ CIX, 281.

⁴⁰ LI, 119.

that it "seems to us needlessly prolix, obscure, and loaded with repetitions."⁴¹ With the completed poem at last before the public, the *Saturday Review* (April 3, 1869) decided: "The length of the poem is far too great; the form of it is clumsy; the repetitions numerous."⁴² "Too much verbiage," agreed the *Westminster Review* (April, 1869).⁴³ "A weariness to the flesh," said the *Quarterly Review* (April, 1869).⁴⁴ Reflecting on the work of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe, *Macmillan's Magazine* (April, 1869) objected: "It would be difficult to name any poem that has endured, whose length at all approaches to that of the 'Ring and the Book,' the subject of which has in itself (apart from the mode of treatment) so little comparative importance."⁴⁵ Two years after the publication of the first installment of the poem, *Saint Paul's* (January, 1871) concluded: "There is too much of everything in it. . . . Art's first office, selection, has been here very imperfectly discharged."⁴⁶

There was little defense, but there was some. John Morley (*Fortnightly*, March 1, 1869) was rather condescending to those who thought the poem too long.⁴⁷ And the reviewer for the *Christian Examiner* (May, 1869) showed himself a very prodigy of enthusiasm: "It would be easy to enumerate various faults, but the length of the poem would not be among them. For ourselves *we wish it was longer*" (*italics mine*). This unique desire was justified as follows:

There seems to be no good reason why a poet should not have as much space as a novelist if he can sustain an interest. And this Browning does to perfection. Once launched upon the current we are swept along at an almost furious rate.⁴⁸

A more cogent though only partial defense was the shrewd analysis in *Fraser's Magazine* (November, 1869). The writer admits that the

⁴¹ XIX, 262.

⁴² XXVII, 461.

⁴³ XCI, 578.

⁴⁴ CXXVI, 347.

⁴⁵ XIX, 544. This second *Macmillan's* article was by J. R. Mozley, not by Symonds.

⁴⁶ VII, 377.

⁴⁷ *Fortnightly*, N.S., V, 333. Though Morley reprinted this review practically unchanged, *Studies in Literature* (London, 1907), pp. 255-85, it does not represent his final judgment of the poem. In his *Recollections* (London 1917), I, 132-33, we find the following comment: "Say what we will of *The Ring and the Book*, its dubious aesthetic, its strain on language and even grammar, the absence from a good half of its pages of music, *its impossible length* [*italics mine*], yet its intellectual moral is lighted up with an intensity of dramatic force that is hardly surpassed in literature."

⁴⁸ LXXXVI, 311. By J. W. Chadwick.

poem, though suitable for the age of Methusaleh, "is far too big for the nineteenth century."

Yet *The Ring and the Book* is an interesting, as well as a great book; spite of its size . . . it does not weary the reader. I venture to think, however, that it would make a far more permanently powerful impression on the mind if the four volumes were condensed to two. It is difficult to say, indeed, how this is to be done without losing much which we should wish to keep. It is quite plain that, under the conditions which we have described, monotony has only been avoided by the exercise of really consummate art.⁴⁹

The art consists, we are told, in reproducing the effect of a trial, where the argument ebbs and flows, disclosing "the speaker's individual idiosyncrasy" and allowing each speaker to enlarge

on one particular episode, which is not mentioned, except in passing, by the others. This episode is in each case that which appears to justify the speaker's conduct, or is otherwise specifically interesting to him. The flight from Arezzo to Rome, for instance, which is barely mentioned by Guido, is fully detailed by Caponsacchi.⁴⁹

This is an important critical perception, easily verifiable from any reader's experience with the poem. Though not specifically formulated by other reviewers of the poem, it is the real explanation of why the condemnation of the poem's length was not far greater, even, than it was.

If the poem was thus by common consent much too long, what should have been left out? The lawyers were an obvious target, and several journals objected to the elaborate treatment given them. *Macmillan's Magazine* (April, 1869) found "the dissertations of the lawyers . . . such as scarcely anyone would choose to read over a second time."⁵⁰ "They only weary us by their futility," said *Chambers Journal* (July 24, 1869).⁵¹ Only one critic defended these two books. *Fraser's Magazine* (November, 1869) spoke second thought instead of first impression:

I have heard it said that an approach to farce at this point—immediately after the beautiful words last quoted [from Pompilia]—must be out of place. I do not feel it to be so. Shakespeare I think would have seen that it was eminently fitting that a criminal trial should take the usual course through the courts, should fall into the hands of Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, and his learned brother. . . .⁵²

⁴⁹ LXXX, 673-74.

⁵⁰ XIX, p. 550.

⁵¹ XLVI, 474. See also *Saturday Review*, XXVII (April 3, 1869), 460; *Electric Magazine*, N.S., IX (May, 1869), 633; *Saint Paul's*, VII (January, 1871), 377.

⁵² LXXX, 677.

This critic would rather have seen omitted "Half-Rome," "The Other Half-Rome," and "Tertium Quid," though they are "extremely clever." *Macmillan's Magazine* (April, 1869) objected to "Tertium Quid" as well as to the two books on the lawyers, and to "The Pope."⁵³ The *Athenaeum* (March 20, 1869) felt that Guido's second speech could have been dispensed with "on account of its extreme and discordant pain. Yet in Guido's speech occurs one of the noblest touches in the whole work"—the concluding appeal to Pompilia.⁵⁴ In all this there seems to be less conviction regarding any individual book than a troubled feeling that by selection and compression the poet might have used his material to better advantage. The attitude of the *Westminster Review* (April, 1869) toward the books on the lawyers is perhaps representative: "To say that there are some beauties in them is to say nothing at all. We expect something more from Mr. Browning."⁵⁵

Like the sheer length of the poem, the style, too, was sharply criticized. The *Athenaeum* (December 26, 1868) thought Browning's manner "that of a magpie"⁵⁶; the *British Quarterly Review* (March, 1869) lamented "power defiant of Art, and original thought hidden in difficult language"⁵⁷; and there were numerous incidental references to his obscurity. The *Spectator* (December 12, 1868) detailed the familiar faults of over-condensation, syntax, coinages, and parentheses.⁵⁸ Browning is, of course, easily vulnerable to such attacks. The notable thing in the reception of *The Ring and the Book* is the vigorous defense put forward by several critics. The *North British Review* (December, 1868) introduced its discussion by an analysis of Wordsworth's two simplicities, that of the lyric and that of his blank verse. Browning, the critic insisted, rejected both, one as too bald, the other as too inflated. Instead, he strove for "a natural flow that shall ascend into the rising inflection, rather than fall, as is so common in the lyrics of Wordsworth, into the namby-pamby clench of the falling inflection." Browning's blank verse this critic found "singularly pure," as "affected simplicity and affected complexity" were alike avoided.⁵⁹ The *Westminster Review* (January, 1869) professed to see in *The Ring and the Book* great improvement over his earlier work:

⁵³ XIX, 550-51.

⁵⁴ No. 2160, p. 400.

⁵⁵ XCI, 577.

⁵⁶ No. 2148, p. 875.

⁵⁷ XLIX, 458.

⁵⁸ XLI, 1465.

⁵⁹ XLIX, 376-77.

In the *Ring and the Book* we so far meet fewer of those wilful extravagances, crabbedness verging to obscurity, and carelessness of expression, which looks like contempt for the reader. The blank verse, too, has a sustained roll and harmony. There is less of that ruggedness of expression which in Mr. Browning's earliest poems so marred the form of the thought. . . . We are constantly surprised by lines of excellent grace. . . .⁶⁰

The *Christian Examiner* (May, 1869) denied at once that the new poem was obscure; objecting to the charge of "Browningese," the reviewer pointed out that Browning—unlike Swinburne, with his predilection for "sweet" and other words—has no pet vocabulary.⁶¹ *Saint Paul's* (January, 1871) found Browning a "master of dramatic blank verse"; in spite of the occasional piling up of consonants there is beautiful harmony and variation in the meter; and there is "magnificence" in many of the similes.⁶² Less a defense and more an explanation of the style was the comment of the *North British Review* (October, 1869):

He must be read running, and read with the eye more than with the ear. To read him aloud, or to let the ear pore over his verse is mortal. But to the intelligence he repays minute study. He presents a boundless chaos of accidental knowledge.⁶³

It is, of course, impossible to say how genuine this apology for Browning's style was. Part of the defense, no doubt, may be set down as rationalizing by those who on other grounds had come to admire Browning, and naturally wished to clear away the reputation for obscurity which was so serious a barrier to his larger popularity. It is notable, too, that some of the favorable comment, though not all, came early and not after the whole poem was available. And, no matter what explanations could be made in behalf of the style, there were many critics who wished it had been better. Some reviewers specifically regretted Browning's failure to include more passages of lyrical quality.⁶⁴

Thus, point by point, there was a division of opinion on the merits of the general design and treatment of the poem. The poem was real, but if Browning had chosen a subject less remote and then treated it more objectively, the result might have been more satisfying. The effect was frequently dramatic, but having approached the drama so nearly, it was a pity that Browning had not in truth become the Victorian

⁶⁰ XCI, 299.

⁶¹ LXXXVI, 295, 312.

⁶² VII, 394-95.

⁶³ LI, 125.

⁶⁴ *Athenaeum*, No. 2148 (December 26, 1868), p. 876; *Saint James Magazine*, N.S., II (December, 1868), 462; *Macmillan's Magazine*, XIX (January, 1869), 258.

Shakespeare. *The Ring and the Book* was "different," novel, but perhaps only on the surface after all. The length, in spite of the interest, and the style, in spite of its vigor, seemed perverse. Most of these misgivings were pronounced or hinted in respectful tones, and mingled with much compliment in the conventional idiom of the day. Yet to say that "the weightier reviews . . . were practically unanimous in their approval"⁶⁵ of the poem is grossly misleading. The careful reader finds admiration joined with genuine disappointment: with his undoubted genius, and his tremendous activity, Mr. Browning might have done more for Victorian literature.

The characters, it is true, were almost universally admired. As I have shown in a previous article,⁶⁶ this was partly because of their sentimental appeal. In a general way, the "message" of the poem was similarly attractive. The *Spectator* (January 30, 1869) emphasized Browning's illustration of the power of love:

Mr. Browning's picture of this passionate human love stirring in the heart of a fashionable, frivolous, and dissipated, but still noble, unspoiled nature, and awakening it at one and the same time to the holiness of the priest's desecrated faith and calling, and to the unearthly beauty of her whom he could not but half-love with earthly rapture and half-adore with a worship very like the true Catholic cultus of the Madonna, is to our minds the finest effort of the author's genius.⁶⁷

Putnam's Magazine (March, 1869) stated as a broader implication of the poem that

where violence is done to natural instincts . . . a reparation of sudden crime and tragedy will follow,—or else the deadly withering and freezing of human hearts.⁶⁸

In contrast were the coolly critical inferences of the *North British Review* (October, 1869): "The very first doctrine to the lyric-philosopher is love at first sight." The obverse of the true morality is to be found in Guido:

Guido is Mr. Browning's Iago; in him we have his ideal of wickedness. Guido is not a man of strong passions, urged by his nature to vice. He is, on the contrary, an artificial man, one whose hinges turn not on the pivot of passion, but on that of reason. He is a walking example of Rousseau's aphorism, "L'homme qui raisonne est un animal depravé." His master-passion is a made-up one, the love of money, which, in common with the mediaeval

⁶⁵ Griffin and Minchin, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁶⁶ Cited in note 7. See particularly pp. 200-03.

⁶⁷ XLII, 140.

⁶⁸ *Putnam's Magazine*, N.S., III, 371.

moralists, Mr. Browning considers the least human and most diabolical of all, because it is simply artificial. . . . Add to him pride, not the natural pride of his far-reaching intelligence, or any other natural gift, but the pride of station, another artificial passion, and we have reason for the cruel vengeance, the "lust and letch of hate" which he exhibits.

Pompilia and Caponsacchi are then described as "lyrical characters . . . wafted over the wild waters of life by the breezes of good feeling and the gales of passionate instinct."⁶⁹

These comments, pro and con, would of course be applicable to Browning's work as a whole. What he specifically set himself to add through *The Ring and the Book* was a doctrine regarding the human perception of truth. John Morley (*Fortnightly*, March 1, 1869) summed it up thus:

The whole poem is a parable of the feeble and half-hopeless struggle which truth has to make against the ways of the world. That in this particular case truth and justice did win some pale sort of victory does not weaken the force of the lesson. The victory was such and so won as to stir in us awful thoughts of fatal risks and certain defeats, of falsehood a thousand times clasped for truth, of fact a thousand times banished for fancy. . . .⁷⁰

This posing of the difficulties of truth in the world is carried to a climax in the treatment of the Pope; here Morley found at its best Browning's courageous facing of reality. The *Christian Examiner* (May, 1869) reduced the point to simpler and more serviceable terms: "Never was dogmatism rebuked more sternly. Never was charity more bravely taught."⁷¹ The *North American Review* (July, 1869) expressed, less hopefully, the same idea as represented in the words of the poem itself: "the cause of 'The Ring and the Book' is a moral and religious lesson,—

This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation, words and wind."⁷²

What then of Browning's vaunted intention to fashion truth from the Old Yellow Book, even as the smith by using art and alloy fashions the ring from "slivers of pure gold"? Oddly enough, few reviewers paid much attention to the idea. The *Saturday Review* (December 26, 1868) referred to the opening passage of the poem as an example of Browning's tendency to strain a metaphor too far, perhaps a natural

⁶⁹ L.I, 113, 121-22.

⁷⁰ N.S., V, 339.

⁷¹ LXXXVI, 314.

⁷² CIX, 283. The passage is from Book XII, 11. 834-36.

conclusion when the reader had only three books of the poem before him.⁷³ Six months later the *North American Review* (July, 1869) inquired, "Had ever poem a lovelier name?"⁷⁴ But it was ornament, not symbolism, that was admired. The *North British Review* (October, 1869), however, gave careful thought to the claims represented in the symbol:

The gold is the dead matter of the poem; the alloy is the "surplusage of soul," which the poet projects into the dead matter to make it malleable; the embossing and shaping is the poetic form; the spirit of acid by which the alloy is washed away is some final act of the poet, by which he removes all traces of himself and leaves the poem quite impersonal. This Mr. Browning claims to have done. . . . But the reader, who will see that each speaker in these idyls talks unmistakeable Browningsese, that, however varied the character, the turns of thought and expression always remain similar . . . will justifiably wonder what spirit it is which has caused that which was only just now alloy suddenly to have become pure unalloyed gold. . . . A great artist will make the alloy entirely impersonal, and will allow it to contain none of the elements of his own biography. But whatever the poet first contributes remains in the perfect poem, unless he writes it all over again. There are not two distinct acts—first of infusing surplusage of soul, and next of washing it away. Here, as elsewhere, Mr. Browning seems, of set purpose, to let an element of incompleteness, or even error, remain in his similes.⁷⁵

It is interesting that this reviewer found the book on the Pope "perhaps the most satisfactory" (p. 123), though this is precisely the section in which he points out the most obvious "surplusage of soul." That is to say, the critic accepted Browning's performance but not his theory. Other British and American critics seem not to have taken the theory seriously enough to argue its validity. The point was vigorously argued against Browning, however, in the interesting French review by Louis Etienne (*Revue de deux mondes*, February 1, 1870). Admitting the vividness of *The Ring and the Book*, its psychological and ethical interest, M. Etienne believes that the peculiar form has complicated the poem and encouraged the natural tendency of the author to prolixity. The use of old materials is legitimate, even brilliant. But Browning thinks he has attained to the pure gold, that is to say to reality. The analogy of the ring is in fact an illusion. Where is the acid which disengages from his work the poetical fiction? If he had found it, he would simply have dissolved the poem. When one would search for the truth he must always lay aside the ring and return to the book. If the poet omitted this misleading thesis that poetry can come at the historical truth better than judges, witnesses, and history itself, the real drama of

⁷³ XXVI, 834.

⁷⁴ LXXXVI, 279.

⁷⁵ LI, 105-06.

the poem would remain. Browning has created Saul, Pompilia, and a multitude of other personages true and living; what advantage is there in this new ambition? In following it he has made his poem long, prolix, and heavy.⁷⁶

Thus Browning's specific doctrine found even less acceptance than his artistic method and judgment. It was the characters of the poem, and the broad moral lessons inherent in their experience, which the reviewers most whole-heartedly admired. In the characters and through them was observable the poet's own vigorous faith that reality was somehow good and true and beautiful. The times needed courage, and Browning seemed to have it. The reviewers admired his pluck in out-lasting neglect. They saw steadfastness in his achievement of a huge masterpiece in the years immediately following his bereavement. The *Edinburgh Review* (July, 1869) ranked Browning with those poets "not vanquished by life"—with Shakespeare, Goethe, and Tennyson (who are contrasted with Shelley, Byron, Heine, and Carlyle). Speaking of the Pope's confronting of his doubts and disappointments, the reviewer drew a parallel:

This is the true felicity of men—to hear, amid the din and direful spectacle of the battle, the sage servant of God and soldier of humanity proclaim, not in any cry of ecstatic hope, but in the calm clear voice of conviction, his faith in the victory to come:

No,— I have light nor fear the dark at all. [R.B., X, 1659].

This is what we meant when we said that Mr. Browning was distinguished by the serenity of his intellect; when we called him a valiant soldier of humanity; when we numbered him among those who, if they have not vanquished, have at least not been vanquished by the problem of human nature.⁷⁷ Such a tribute—and there were many—registers a personal triumph rather than an artistic one. In the very enthusiasm of the reviewers there was not so much a confidence that the intelligent reading public would enjoy *The Ring and the Book*, as a conviction that because "Beauty has come with edification in her train,"⁷⁸ they ought to enjoy it, regardless of the inconvenience. The psychology which in 1881 resulted in the formation of the Browning Society was already well developed.

⁷⁶ LXXXV, 733-35. This review, entitled "Une nouvelle forme de poesie dramatique," is a general estimate of Browning based upon the 1868 collection of his works as well as the newer poem. After a leisurely and intelligent discussion of Browning's relation to the English public, his indebtedness to Shelley, his psychological interest, and his early poems, of which "Saul," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Andrea del Sarto" are discussed as typical, the reviewer turns to *The Ring and the Book*. There is a long sympathetic analysis of Pompilia's speech, through which the essence of the story is made clear; the passage summarized above follows.

⁷⁷ CXXX, 182.

⁷⁸ *London Quarterly Review*, XXXII (July, 1869), 340.

THE CRAFTSMAN OF JULY 2, 1737, and COLLEY CIBBER

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The Licensing Act of 1737 had a variety of consequences, great and small, upon the theatrical world of London, but there was one controversy, both political and literary in nature, which has not been particularly noticed before and in which the name of Colley Cibber was involved. The incident occurred during a quarrel between two newspapers—a controversy which had become heightened during the latter part of May and most of June, 1737, when the Act was in the process of being pushed through Parliament. Most of the quarrel was political, as was a great deal of the controversy over the Act; the *Daily Gazetteer*, a Government organ, gave over a number of issues in June to a determined defense of the bill, and the *Country Journal, or Craftsman*, an Opposition paper edited by Caleb D'Anvers, just as vigorously attacked it. Even the passage of the Act did not still the tumult of *Gazetteer* versus *Craftsman*.

So far as the *Craftsman* was concerned, however, its polemics came to an unexpected climax with the issue of July 2, 1737 (No. 574), which contained a long letter purporting to be by Colley Cibber, since it was signed "C.C.P.L." (Colley Cibber, Poet Laureate). The letter, addressed to Caleb D'Anvers, suggests that, although the *Craftsman* was opposed to the Licensing Act, perhaps it would be interested in seeing the Act, now passed, made genuinely effective. In order to make it valuable, the writer says, the authorities must supervise old plays as well as new because there are passages in earlier plays which may be given a political implication in later revivals; the author further proposes that no one is better suited for the office of examiner of the plays than he is. The letter, which follows,¹ is a detailed statement of the case (the first paragraph being the editor's comment):

To give the World a manifest Proof of my Impartiality, upon all Occasions, I will print a Letter, which I have lately received from a new Correspondent; though at the same Time I own that the *Pertness*, as well as *Familiarity of the Style*, gives me some Offence; but I presume it may be the peculiar Manner of the *Author*, and as such I will pass it over for the present.

¹ Because files of the *Craftsman* in the original state are rare, it seems advisable to reprint the entire letter.

To CALEB D'ANVERS, Esq;

Dear Caleb,

Quod fieri non debet, factum valet, is the Saying of some *old Craftsman*, and as it is a very wise Maxim, I shall venture to write to Thee upon it. I was in Hopes that tho' You were against the *Bill, for Licensing the Stage*, You would be for making it effectual, now it is pass'd into a *Law*. I take Thee to be no *Jacobite*, though a damn'd morose Prig of a *Patriot*; but thy Papers being read, when our *Gazetters* are never heard of, give me leave to make them the Vehicle of some Observations I have set down for the *Licenser's* Use. A Person of his Rank, though He delighted never so much in reading, cannot be presumed to have Leisure enough for so tedious an Employment; and I would willingly shew him how proper I am for the Business, having, by my former Vocation, several Plays by Heart, and tho' I say it, that should not say it, the best Judge in *England* of all *dramatical Performances*.

I write to You, upon this Occasion, with the more Freedom, because You were formerly pleased to recommend Me as a proper Supervisor of all Plays, old and new, and to make an *Index expurgatorius* of such Passages as are not now fit to be brought upon the Stage. I have taken thy Hint, and set my mark upon a Multitude of Passages in Plays now in Being, which will be proper to be left out in all future Representations of them. For Method's Sake I have put them under several Heads, as they regards *Politicks*, *Divinity*, or *Bawdry*. The *first* of these shall be chiefly my Province; and if I might presume to recommend a fit Person to take care of the *other two Heads*, I would name Mr. Orator *H---*y, not only as He is undoubtedly orthodox, and of a sound Character in every other Respect, but likewise because He may at present be an Object of *Charity*, since the *Oratory* itself may come under the Description of the *Act*, which takes in all *Interludes*, where Money is given at the Door.

The Passages I have already collected upon this Head of *Politicks*, which I have undertaken, are so very numerous, that I can only give You a little Specimen of them at present, with relation to *Kings*, *Queens*, *Princes*, and *Ministers of State*.

I shall begin with *The Life and Death of King JOHN*, which I had alter'd from *Shakespeare*; though the Town was so unreasonably prejudiced against Me, that They almost unanimously combined against its Representation; and I am Sorry to say, *Caleb*, that Thou wast in the

Number. But I doubt not to convince Thee, by a few Passages from it, that it ought not to be acted at present, without an *Alteration*, though Mr. *R--h* hath had the Presumption to do it, after mine was rejected.

In the first Place, it is to be observed, that King *John* is represented through the whole Play as an *Usurper*, who seized and kept the *Crown*, in Prejudice to his elder Brother *Geoffrey's* Son, *Arthur*, who was then abroad and supported by the Court of *France*. This young Prince's Mother, *Constance*, is drawn as a Woman of great Spirit, and *Shakespeare* hath put several Speeches in her Mouth, which are capable of very bad Applications; particularly the following.

*When Law can do no Right,
Let it be lawful that Law barr no Wrong.
Law cannot give my Child his Kingdom here;
For He, that holds his Kingdom, holds the Law.
Therefore since Law itself is perfect Wrong,
How can the Law forbid my Tongue to curse?*

This is a downright Assertion that *England* was then under a *Parliamentary Tyranny*, or *legal Slavery*; and as you Malcontents are charged with hinting at something of the same Nature at present, I left out the whole Passage, in my *Alteration* of *this Play*.

King *John* having intirely lost the Affections of his People, Cardinal *Pandulph*, the *Pope's* Legate, encourages the *Dolphin* of *France* to invade *England*, in the following Terms, which I had likewise omitted.

*If but a dozen French
Were there in Arms, They would be as a Call
To train ten thousand English to their Side;
Or as a little Snow, tumbled about,
Anon becomes a Mountain—O noble Dolphin,
Go with me to the† King; 'tis wonderful
What may be wrought out of their Discontent,
Now that their Souls are topful of Offence.*

When the King heard of the *Dolphin's* being landed with a Body of Forces, He speaks thus to *Hubert*, whom He had ordered to murder Prince *Arthur*.

*It is the Curse of Kings, to be attended
By Slaves, that take their Humours for a Warrant*

† The King of France

*And on the winking of Authority,
To understand a Law; to know the Meaning
Of dangerous Majesty, when perchance it frowns
More upon Humour than advis'd Respect.*

How this may be apply'd I leave You and the Reader to judge, as well as the following Passage in the same Play, where the *King* conjures the *Cardinal Legate* to make Use of his Authority against the *French*, who were then advancing against Him.

*Our discontented Counties do revolt;
Our People quarrel with Obedience,
Swearing allegiance and the Love of Soul
To stranger-Blood, to foreign Royalty.
This Inundation of mistemper'd Humour
Rests by You only to be qualify'd.
Then pause not; for the present Time's so sick,
That present Medicine must be minister'd,
Or Overthrow incurable ensues.*

This Play concludes with the Death of the *King*; who, being obliged to leave the Field, retired to *Swineshead Abbey*, where He was supposed to be poison'd by a Monk; upon which the discontented Lords deserted the *French*, and join'd with Prince *Henry*, their new Sovereign, in the Defense of their Country, which his *Father* had brought to the very Brink of Destruction.---Dost not Thou think, *Caleb*, that this Moral requires a different Turn; or that very invidious Constructions may be put upon it, as it stands at present? I took Care to prevent all these in my Alteration; but as the world was not pleased with it, *Modesty* obliges me to be silent, upon that Head.

The next play, that falls under my Consideration, is *the Life and Death of King Richard the 2d*, written by the *same Author*; which hath not been acted within my Memory, and I think never ought, without considerable Castrations and Amendments; for it not only represents an *obstinate, misguided Prince* deposed by his *People*, which is agreeable enough to the Principles of the *Revolution*; but likewise contains several Passages, which the *disaffected* may turn to their Account.---I will mention only two or three.

The *King*, speaking of the Duke of *Hereford* (his Successor, by the Name of *Henry the 4th*) makes the following Reflection upon his *Popularity*.

—Bagot and Greene

*Observ'd his Courtship to the common People ;
How He did seem to dive into their Hearts,
With humble and familiar courtesie ;
What Reverence He did throw away on Slaves,
Wooing poor Craftsmen with the Craft of Souls,
And patient under-bearing of his Fortune.*

It is to be observed that the *King* had used the *Duke of Hereford* very ill; and though He was neither his *Son*, nor his *lawful Heir*, malicious People may apply it to *Princes* between whom there is a much nearer Relation. I need say no more; but shall leave it to your Judgment whether this Passage ought not to be expunged, as well as the whole first Scene of the second Act; particularly where *John of Gaunt*, Duke of *Lancaster*, foretells the Fate of the King, his Nephew, just before his Death. As you formerly quoted this prophetic Speech in one of your Papers, I shall repeat only the Conclusion of it.

*This Land of such dear Souls, this dear-dear Land,
Dear for her Reputation through the World,
Is new leas'd out, (I dye pronouncing it)
Like to a Tenement, or pelting Farm.
England, bound in with the triumphant Sea,
Whose rocky Shore beats back the envious Siege,
Of watery Neptune, is bound in with Shame,
With INKY BLOTS, and ROTTEN PARCHMENT
BONDS.
That England, that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful Conquest of itself.*

This is such a general Reflection upon my *dear Country*, and the whole Mystery of *Treaty-making*, that I think it ought not to be suffer'd to appear, even in *Print*, much less to be pronounced on the *Stage*.

In another Part of the same Scene, *old Gaunt* addresses the *King*, in this licentious Manner, which will likewise admit of very bad Constructions.

*Thy Deathbed is no lesser than the Land,
Wherein Thou lyest in Reputation sick,
And Thou too careless, patient as Thou art,
Commit'st thy anointed Body to the Cure
Of those Physicians, that first wounded Thee;*

*A thousand Flatterers sit within thy Crown,
Whose Compass is no bigger than thy Hand,
And yet incag'd in so small a Verge,
The Waste is no whit lesser than thy Land.*

At the latter End of this Scene, the following Dialogue passes between *Northumberland*, *Willoughby* and *Ross*; which is more intolerable than all the rest.

Nor. *The King is not Himself, but basely led
By Flatterers, and what They will inform
Meerly in Hate 'gainst any of us all,
That will the King severely prosecute
'Gainst us, our Lives, our Children and our Heirs.*

Ross. *The Commons hath He pill'd with grievous Taxes,
And quite lost their Hearts. The Nobles hath He fin'd
For antient Quarrels, and quite lost their Hearts.*

Will. *And daily new Exactions are devis'd;
But what O'God's Name doth become of this?*

Nor. *Wars have not wasted it; for warr'd He hath not,
But basely yielded upon Compromise
That, which his Ancestors achiev'd with Blows.
More hath He spent in Peace than They in Wars.*

This wants no Comment; and therefore I shall proceed to the *Second Part of Henry the 4th*, which was likewise written by *Shakespeare*. Every Body knows that *this Prince* mounted the Throne, upon the Deposition of *Richard the 2d*, by the Assistance and with the general Approbation of the *People*; but He soon lost the Hearts of his best Friends, the Earl of *Northumberland*, *Worcester*, and *Harry Piercy*, who were principally instrumental in advancing Him to the Throne, by neglecting their Services, and provoked Them to take up Arms against Him. As They were very popular Lords, many others join'd with Them; and amongst the rest, the *Archbishop of York*, who encourages Them with Hopes of Success by the following Observation:

*The Commonwealth is sick of their own Choice;
Their over-greedy Love hath surfeited.*

The *Jacobites* may take Occasion from hence to suggest, I dare not say what, and point it out to the Notice of the Audience by *Clapping*; which one of my *honourable Friends* hath lately proved to be a

very seditious and almost treasonable Practice.—Let this Passage therefore be expunged, as well as several others in both *Parts of the same Play*, which I have mark'd down in my *Index expurgatorius*.

You have already observed that *Ben Johnson's* SEJANUS and Sir *John Denham's* SOPHY have not been acted these many Years. The *Fall of* MORTIMER was lately prohibited, after it had run several Nights; and there are many other Plays, which require the same *una Litura*, or at least very large Expurgations; such as the tragical Part of the *Spanish Fryer*, *Don Sebastian*, and even *Cato* itself, which abound with insufferable Reflections upon *Kings*, *Queens*, *Favourites*, and *wicked Men in Power*.

I do not remember that *All for Love*, or *the World well lost*, hath been acted at either House for a Year or two past; and I hope the *present worthy Managers of our Theatres* will have the prudence not to bring it on again, for some Time, or to suppress the following Passages. The first is where *Ventidius* speaks thus to *Alexas*, concerning *Anthony's* unseasonable and ridiculous Fondness for a *foreign Mistress*.

*I tell Thee, Eunuch, She hath quite unman'd Him.
Can any Roman see, and know Him now,
Thus alter'd from the Lord of half Mankind,
Unbent, unsinew'd, made a Woman's Toy,
Shrunk from the vast Extent of all His Honours,
And cramp'd within a Corner of the World?*

Who knows how This may be apply'd; or whether our *factionous Patriots* may not lay the Scene in *some other Corner of the World*, besides *AEgypt*?---This Subject is farther pursued in several Parts of the same Play; particularly in the third Act, by *Ventidius* and *Dolabella*; the latter of whom *Anthony* reproaches with his former Passion for *Cleopatra*; upon which *Dolabella* replies thus.

*Dola. And should my Weakness be a Plea for yours?
Mine was an Age, when Love might be excused,
When kindly Warmth, and when my springing Youth
Made it a Debt to Nature, Yours---*

*Vent. --- speak boldly.
Yours, He would say, in your declining Age,
When no more Heat was left but what was forced;
When all the Sap was needful for the Trunk,
When it went down, then You constrain'd the Course,*

*And robb'd from Nature to supply Desire.
In You (I would not use so harsh a Word)
'Tis but plain Dotage.*

I will not pretend to say that Mr. *Dryden* prophetically intended any Reflection, upon the *present Times*, in this Dialogue: but that it may be construed in such a Sense by Those, who are so much addicted to *Parallels* and *Applications*, I believe nobody will deny; and therefore it ought to be suppress'd.

There are several Passages, to the same Purpose, in *Lee's Alexander*, or the *Rival Queens*; but I shall instance only the following. The *Queen Consort* speaks it.

*Stat. Roxana then enjoys my perjured Love;
Roxana clasps my Monarch in her Arms,
Doats on my Conqueror, my dear Lord, my King*

As to *Ministers of State*, especially *Prime-Ministers*, all our modern Plays are so full of Satire upon them, that it would require Volumes to make Extracts from them at large. I shall therefore mention only one; I mean the Tragedy of Sir *Walter Raleigh*; which, besides the general Reflection upon our Country, for being tamely bully'd and insulted by *Spain*, is stuff'd with the grossest and most virulent Aspersions upon *great Men*, who have the Happiness to get at the Height of Power and Favour with their Prince.—*Carew*, a Friend of Sir *Raleigh*, inveighs against the *Corruption* of those times, in the following Manner.

*Car. That Gold, believe me, Sir, is well employ'd.
It works like Poison through our weaken'd State.
Infects our generous pure Forefathers Blood,
And fits our free-born Souls for foreign Yokes.
How many noble Structures could I name,
What sumptuous Villa's, labour'd up to Heaven,
Enrich'd with figured Silk, and stiff with Gold,
But not one Tale in all the Pile to say,
"These are the Monuments of perjured Faith,
"The high-raised Spoils of mercenary Greatness?*

Lord *Cobham* speaks to the same Effect; and though He is represented mad, there seems to be very good Sense in what he says, however liable to bad Interpretations. I will only give you a short Specimen of it.

*Cob. O. what a Mine of Mischief is a Statesman!
 Ye furious Whirlwinds, and ye treacherous Rocks,
 Ye ministers of Death, devouring Fire,
 Convulsive Earthquake, and Plague-tainted Air,
 All You are merciful, and mild to Him,
 The passive Instruments of righteous Heaven,
 But He, for Goodness form'd, and placed to bless,
 Wilful opposes Providence in Spight,
 And is a DEVIL, of his own Formation.*

The dying Advice, which Sir *Walter Raleigh* gives to his Son, savours likewise of the same malevolent Spirit, as you will perceive by the following Lines.

*Ral. Contract no Friendship with an o'ergrown Greatness;
 Falling, it crushes Thee; and standing long,
 Grows insolently weary of Support,
 And spurns the Props, that held it up before.*

It is needless to quote any more after This; and besides my letter is already grown too long. The only Design of it is to shew that the *late Act, for restraining the Stage*, will not answer the Purpose intended by it, unless there be some Regulation of *old Plays*, as well as *new ones*; and that Nobody, without Vanity, is fitter for this Office than *Myself*. It will be a pretty Augmentation to *That*, which I now enjoy; and, indeed, I have already distinguish'd myself in so remarkable a Manner, by gutting *other People's Works*, that I am in no great Doubt of succeeding. I can only add, that if *his Grace* should be pleased to bestow *this Employment* upon Me, I will execute it, with great Industry, to the Confusion of all *Papists, Jacobites, Incendiaries*, and *Patriots*.

*I am thine,
 as far as becomes me,
 C.C.P.L.*

Before the authorship of the letter is considered, it may be well to notice the results of its appearing in the *Craftsman*. The principal one was the taking into custody of the printer of that journal.² In a later issue, as reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the editor of the *Craftsman* told what happened to him following the appearance of the letter:

² See *Gentleman's Magazine*, VII (July, 1737), 430.

The Public, says Mr. *D'Anvers*, cannot be Strangers to y^e extraordinary Measures taken against *this Paper*. The Publication was not only stop'd for a Week, and several Persons taken up and detained an *unusual Time* in Custody without being examined, but the *Shop-Books* and other *Accounts*, nay even the *Advertisements* for the Week were likewise seized, and the *House* where the Paper was printed, shut up by the Messengers.³

For the *Daily Gazetteer* the letter of "C.C.P.L." proved to be a golden opportunity. In its issue of July 7, 1737, it made the most of what it termed the libelous qualities of the letter. In doing so, it to some extent misrepresented the professed purpose of the letter; for, instead of considering that its author merely suggested that audiences might construe the passages quoted from Shakespeare and other authors into reflections upon ministers and rulers, the *Daily Gazetteer* took the point of view that the letter was deliberately making the quotations applicable to the contemporary ministers and King. As the *Daily Gazetteer* said:

and so thro' the whole Paper, he takes care to give the Reader very strong Intimations of his Meaning, to avoid any Possibility of a Mistake; and indeed I believe no one can be so dull as not very perfectly to understand him.

Elsewhere in the same issue the *Daily Gazetteer* used stronger language in attacking the purpose of the *Craftsman*:

THIS Age has abounded with Writings of this Sort; but certainly of all the Libels that ever polluted the Press none ever equalled the *Craftsman* of last *Saturday*: The furious Zeal of that Writer has, upon many Occasions, carried him very extraordinary Lengths before; but in that Paper he has broke thro' all the Bounds of Decency, and has exceeded every thing that could be imagined, even from him. . . .

NOTHING therefore can be more evident, if the Writer's own Word may be taken for it, than, that this Paper is the greatest Insult and most notorious Abuse that was ever offer'd to the Supreme Power of a chief Magistrate of and Country, in any Age or Nation.

Sometime later, on August 6, the *Craftsman* attempted to put the motives of the letter in its issue of July 2 in their true light. It was an attempt to vindicate both the editor and the author of the letter:

I appeal to any Man of common Sense and Candour, whether the natural and obvious Design of that Paper was not to shew that several *old Plays* are capable of as bad Applications as any *new ones* can be. For this Purpose, several Passages are quoted out of old Plays, with Relation to *Kings, Queens, Ministers of State*, which it is said *malicious People* may apply in a bad Sense; but the

³ *Craftsman*, No. 576, July 27, as quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, VII (July, 1737), 437-38.

Author of that Paper makes no Application of them himself, and only recommended them to the Care of the *Licensor*, or his *Deputy*. I hope, for the Honour of our Country, which hath long boasted of its *Freedom*, that a few Quotations out of *old Plays*, in order to illustrate this Point, cannot be deemed criminal in Law.

The discussion in the two papers did not end there, but nothing new was injected into the controversy.

In all the argument which grew out of the letter, all sight seems to have been lost of Cibber; nor does there appear to be any evidence that Cibber was taken into custody or punished in any way. Nevertheless, one can find evidence which suggests that Cibber might actually have written the letter. In the first place, nearly all the statements in it are factually true, so far as we know, about Cibber. The letter implies, in the first paragraph, that its author favored the Licensing Act, and Cibber had done so.⁴ But more specific evidence lies in the fourth paragraph. There the author speaks of his having "alter'd from *Shakespeare*" the *Life and Death of King John*, which Cibber only that spring had been engaged in doing. His next statement, that the "Town was so unreasonably prejudiced against its Representation" that he withdrew it, is also true; he withdrew the play because he feared it was going to be damned.⁵

In the following paragraphs the author discusses what portions need to be eliminated from *King John* to make it suitable for production on the stage. There he quotes four passages from Shakespeare's play which might prove political dynamite; of the first two the author of the letter says that he omitted them in his adaptation of *King John*, and it is notable that in Cibber's adaptation of that play—which was not published until 1745 as *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* and which it seems unlikely would have been seen in manuscript by anyone wishing to write a letter of this sort—those two passages are entirely missing. Of the other two passages the author merely says that the editor and reader may consider how they might be interpreted; here it is interesting to note that, in Cibber's adaptation, the third was restated, the last omitted. The rephrasing of the third, which does not affect the meaning, is as follows:

⁴ See Cibber's *Apology*, Chapter VIII.

⁵ This incident would certainly have been in the minds of most Londoners who followed literary or even political affairs, for there was a good deal of writing, explanatory and satiric, concerning the episode. See C. W. Nichols, "Fielding and the Cibbers," *PQ*, I, 284-85, and my articles, "Cibber, *King John*, and the Students of the Law," *MLN*, LIII (1938), 272-75 and "Fielding's Last Season with the Haymarket Theatre," *MP*, XXXVI (1939), 286-87.

O! 'tis the Curse of Princes to be serv'd
 By Slaves, that take their Wishes for a Warrant;
 That, on the bare Inquietude of Looks,
 Presume t'expound our Passions into Law,
 And on the Sanction of a Frown commit
 Such Deeds as damns the Conscience that conceives them.

It is possible, in view of Cibber's extensive alterations of Shakespeare's play in his adaptation of it, that three passages out of the four cited could have been omitted by chance, but the coincidence seems rather strong.⁶

On the other hand, there is a great deal of evidence that tends to suggest that the whole letter was a hoax so far as Cibber's authorship was concerned. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, in discussing the fact that the issue of the *Craftsman* containing the letter resulted in the printer's being taken into custody, refers to its authorship in phraseology which suggests that there was doubt then whether Cibber was actually the author:

*It may suffice therefore at present to observe that it is wrote in the Person of C. C--bb-r, Esq. P. L. for the use (as pretended) of the noble Licenser of Plays.*⁷

The phrase "in the Person of C.C--bb-r" may be only the result of caution on the part of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but the phrase "as pretended" expresses an even greater doubt of its authenticity. Too, it will be noticed that the *Gazetteer* of July 7 is so phrased as to suggest that the writers of that journal thought the letter was probably written by the *Craftsman* itself. The *Gazetteer* mentions that the *Craftsman* has often been carried by his "furious Zeal" into "very Extraordinary Lengths before" and, without mentioning Cibber, continues to say that "in that Paper he [presumably D'Anvers] has . . . exceeded every thing that could be imagined, even from him." Similarly, the defense which the *Craftsman* made in its issue of August 6 does not refer to Cibber by name; instead of saying, as an editor often does, that he took the letter at its face value, the *Craftsman* launched into a defense of the purpose of the letter and appears to betray a greater knowledge of the origin and purpose of it than he would have needed to plead if he were not the author.

⁶ Another possibility is that when, years later, Cibber finally published his alteration as *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* (1745), the recollection of these citations in the *Craftsman* might have suggested to him that he omit them from his revision.

⁷ *Gentleman's Magazine*, VII (July, 1737), 430.

A great deal of the other evidence against Cibber's authorship is less tangible. In the first place, Cibber had earlier that spring, on February 4, published a letter in the *Daily Advertiser* to which he had signed his full name. In the second place, there appears to have been no public ridicule of Cibber for this letter; and, as every one knows, nearly every act of Cibber's brought ridicule upon him from one source or another. To be sure, many of the journals or people who might have turned the letter against Cibber were not active anymore—Fielding, if still producing plays, undoubtedly would have made interesting dramatic capital if he had thought the letter truly by Cibber. Nevertheless, the *Grub Street Journal*, still active, seems to have passed the letter by without giving it particular attention, an action contrary to its usual practice. The *Daily Advertiser*, one of the less politically biased dailies of which a file for July, 1737, is extant, appears not to have mentioned during that month the letter or the taking into custody of the printer of the *Craftsman*. Significant, too, is the fact that there seems to be no allusion to the episode in *An Apology for the Life of Mr. T..... C....., Comedian* (London: 1740), sometimes attributed to Henry Fielding, who might have been expected to refer to the incident.

Some of the internal evidence within the letter also seems not Cibberian in tone or material. This is especially true of the last paragraph. Though the statements in the opening paragraph of the letter—that the author has “several Plays by Heart” and “is the best Judge in England of all *dramatical Performances*”—are not unlike Cibber's frequent boastful frankness about himself, the last paragraph contains some statements which seem less likely to have come from him willingly. Especially is this true of the remark that he had “already distinguish'd [himself] in so remarkable a Manner, by gutting *other People's Works*.” That is what Cibber's enemies had been saying about him every time he adapted another author's plays—Vanbrugh's or Shakespeare's—for the stage, and it seems very unlikely that Cibber himself would have referred to his own efforts in such baldly uncomplimentary and satiric tones.

Thus, it may be said, that, although there is a great deal of material which points toward an accurate knowledge of Cibber's activities, there is only one portion of the evidence—the four passages extracted from Shakespeare's *King John* for examination, with three of them omitted from Cibber's adaptation—which was not public knowledge at the time. Even so, the omission of three of the cited passages from *King John*

may possibly be due to chance or to his deciding, in the years intervening between the appearance of this letter in 1737 and the adaptation in 1745, that it would be a matter of wisdom to omit such material from stage production. The other evidence—the phrasing of some portions of the letter, the absence of ridicule or discussion of Cibber's supposed part in it, and, finally, the seemingly unwise act of Cibber's choosing an Opposition paper in which to set forth a request for a Government position—suggests that Cibber's name was used by the *Craftsman* as a protection for itself and that no one was for very long of the opinion that Cibber actually wrote the letter. At any rate, it seems more likely that Cibber did not write it than that he did.

ARMOR AND WEAPONS IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES

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I

Virtually every writer who has dealt with the Middle English romances has committed himself in regard to the accuracy with which these poems reflect the life of their day. Opinions on this issue differ sharply: some scholars hold that there is, in general, little correspondence between the romances and their times,¹ and others assert that a considerable amount of realism is to be found in the romance portrayals of mediaeval life.² An investigation of one important phase of this large problem—namely, the reflection in the romances of mediaeval military equipment—will, it is hoped, help to clarify the existing confusion.

In the typical romance story, the chief personages belong to the aristocratic or knightly class,³ and, consequently, one finds that armor, arms, and military adventure figure prominently in all but a very few of the hundred-odd Middle English chivalric poems that survive. It must be admitted, however, that clear descriptions of the war equipment and warlike exploits of the heroes of romance are disappointingly rare by reason of a common failing of romance poets. This failing is a

¹Typically, literary historians assume that the romances are 'fanciful'—that the usual romance is, as Dr. Johnson once stated, "a military fable of the Middle Ages, a tale of wild adventure in love and chivalry." Bishop Hurd observed that the old romances "outraged the truth in their extravagant pictures of chivalry." (*Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 1762 [ed. Edith J. Morley, London, 1911], p. 146). In Bishop Hurd's opinion, many contemporary scholars concur: Ernest Albert Baker in *The History of the English Novel: The Age of Romance . . .* (London, 1924), pp. 11-49; Rowland Edmund Prothero, Lord Ernle in *The Light Reading of Our Ancestors* (London, 1927), pp. 72-85; George Wyndham in *Essays in Romantic Literature* by George Wyndham, ed. Charles Whibley (London, 1919), pp. 5-41; and Reinald Hoops in *Der Begriff 'Romance' in der mittel-englischen und frühneuenglischen Literatur*, "Anglistische Forschungen," Heft 68 (Heidelberg, 1929), p. 54.

²See Henry Osborn Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind* (New York, 1919), I, 574-603, and Charles Victor Langlois, *La Société française au XIII^e siècle d'après dix romans d'aventure* (2nd ed., Paris, 1904), especially p. iii.

³The heroes of romance are always feudal nobles and generally men of great estate and importance. It is true that the hero in the Scottish poem, *Rauf Coilzear*, and the Carl in *The Carle of Carelyle* are basely born men, but in both cases it is evident that the poets were relating amusing tales. The incongruity of conferring knighthood on such ignoble louts as Rauf and the Carl was doubtless meant to be the chief point of humor.

seemingly irresistible preference for common-places, or trite, colorless expressions in place of fresh, original description, and nowhere is it better illustrated than when armor and weapons are mentioned. No doubt, contemporaneous listeners could read missing detail into these worn-out formulas so treasured by romance composers and singers, but it must have wearied even the mediaeval audience to hear repeated again and again, in the course of a single poem, such tags as "bryght swerdus," "ryche hawberkes," "geldene scheldus," "wip helme on heuede and brini brizt," "wip scheld & wip spere," "with helme, schelde, and hauberke browne," or "helme, hauberke and all of stele." Of course, the poets occasionally broke through such traditional phrasing and wrote clear-enough descriptions of the arms and armor with which their heroes were provided, and it is with these passages that the present study is concerned.

The degree of realism represented by the more satisfactory passages of description may be determined, of course, only by comparisons with actual mediaeval armor and weapons. It is necessary, then, to enter upon brief discussions of the various types of military equipment which the knights of England (only the English romances being studied here) are known to have used.⁴

II

The most important part of the knight's accoutrements was his body armor. It is possible to distinguish several stages in the development of the body armor worn by English knights during the feudal age, which for present purposes may be dated from 1066 to 1485:

i. The primitive ringed byrnie, or leathern coat on which iron rings were sewed, was worn by Norman invaders and by Anglo-Norman knights till about 1180.⁵ The equally primitive padded or quilted body protector seems also to have been worn during this period.⁶

⁴ For full accounts of mediaeval military equipment, see Guy Francis Laking, *A Record of European Arms and Armour*, London, 1920-25; Alwin Schultz, *Das höfische Leben zur Zeit der Minnesinger*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1889; and Hans Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst in Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*, 3 vols., Berlin, 1900-07. It is not possible to include in this paper a consideration of the brasses and the other non-literary evidence from which our knowledge of the arms and armor used by actual English knights is derived.

⁵ Charles H. Ashdown, *Armour and Weapons in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1925), pp. 23-27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

On the Bayeux Tapestry the differences in cross-hatching by which the warriors' hauberks are represented suggest that some may have been quilted but that most of them were covered with iron rings. *The Bayeux Tapestry Reproduced in Autotype Plates*, ed. Frank Rede Fowkes (London, 1875), plates XXIII, XXIV, and LIV through LXXIX.

ii. The coat hauberk fashioned entirely of meshed iron rings or chain-mail, instead of iron rings sewed on a fabric or leathern tunic, was the chief form of armor from approximately 1180 till 1325. During the later years of this period, the hauberk was often supplemented by an iron breast-plate and by elbow guards of *cuir bouilli* or of metal. The knights also wore hose of chain-mail the knees of which were reinforced by leathern or metal guards.⁷

iii. For a short time in the early fourteenth century (about 1325-35), a kind of composite armor was worn which consisted of a thickly padded shirt known as the haqueton, the chain-mail hauberk, a padded or quilted coat called the gambeson, and sometimes a loose, outer robe (cyclas) as well. Apparently the three layers of quilted, loosely fitting fabric protectors had the effect of deadening a sword blow or a lance thrust, and, when backed up by the chain-mail hauberk, must have constituted an efficient, though scarcely impenetrable, defense. Armor of this type, however, occasioned the wearers considerable discomfort, especially in warm weather.⁸

iv. This stifling composite armor was supplanted before the middle of the fourteenth century by a new form of reinforced chain-mail hauberk. Instead of being strengthened merely by leathern or metal elbow guards and breast-plate, the hauberk of this period was ribbed with narrow plates or splints of steel affixed to the arms, breast, and back. Studded or splinted armor, as it was called, was used particularly during the period 1335-60.⁹

v. In the late fourteenth century, English knights wore plate-mail, or body armor formed of steel plates bent to conform to the body and fixed together with flexible joints to allow tolerably free motion. So-called Gothic armor, or complete suits of plate, grooved to cause a sword or lance point to slide off the surface, came to be used in England after about 1430.¹⁰ The Gothic style of armor, of which many examples survive, was the most beautiful and effective devised by mediaeval craftsmen.¹¹

It is seen, then, that body armor developed from the crudely reinforced leathern jerkin or ringed byrnie of William the Conqueror's day into the carefully fitted and beautifully decorated cap-a-pie suits

⁷ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42, and 53-57.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-74, and p. 80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-18, and 137-40.

¹¹ See illustrations in Laking, *op. cit.*

of complete steel belonging to the fifteenth century. Not every stage in this five-hundred-year evolution is represented in the Middle English romances, but several of the numerous types of body armor are unmistakably and rather often depicted:

i. In the first place, there seem to be no recognizable descriptions of the ancient ringed byrnie of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

ii. The next stage in the development of armor—chain-mail—is represented in a large number of romances. At least, such common phrases as “bryghte mayles” or “clere maylis”¹² suggest armor composed entirely of iron links (“mayles”) rather than any other sort. The poets often draw a distinction between chain-mail hauberks which were bright and clean (“brini bryȝt”) and those which were rusty (“hauberke browne”). Evidently, clean and shining armor was preferable, and one of the special virtues of the armor, on one occasion donned by the celebrated Guy of Warwick, was that it had not rusted during thirty years of disuse:

Thritty wynters and well more
Was hit not on-folden ore:
Hit was so clere and so bryght,
All the hall shone of the lyght.¹³

Many romance knights appear to have been attired not simply in the chain-mail hauberk, but in chain-mail reinforced with iron breast-plate and guard-plates of metal for knee or elbow. Plates, in fact, are very often mentioned in such phrases as “Wiȝ helme, & plate, & brini bryȝt,”¹⁴ but much clearer descriptions of reinforced chain-mail are to be found. For example, Libeaus Desconus is said to have cut through his opponent’s hauberk, breast-plate, and gipel or padded vest:

Libeaus was a werrior wiȝt
And smitte a stroke of miȝt
boruȝ gipell, plate and maile.¹⁵

King Richard is for one of his encounters provided “wiȝ plates off good steel”¹⁶ under his hauberk, and in *Eger and Grime*, the hero is

¹² *Morte Arthure*, ed. George G. Perry, *EETS*, VII (1865), v. 2250 and 3646.

¹³ *Guy of Warwick*, ed. Julius Zupitza, *EETSES*, XLII, XLIX, LIX (1883, 1887, 1891), Caius MS., vv. 8105-08.

¹⁴ *Guy of Warwick*, ed. cit., Auchinleck MS., stanza 91, v. 2.

¹⁵ *Libeaus Desconus*, ed. Max Kaluza, *Altenglische Bibliothek*, V (Leipzig, 1890), vv. 1471-73.

¹⁶ *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ed. Karl Brunner, *Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie*, XLII (Wien und Leipzig, 1913), v. 5706.

shown tearing the breast-plate from his fallen enemy that he might give him the *coup de grace*:

he let him neuer recouer more;
his brest plate from him he cast,
& thrise to the hart he him thrust.¹⁷

iii. Heavily padded body protectors—the “linges armeüres” mentioned in *Guillaume le Maréchal*¹⁸—were no doubt used throughout the feudal age, but, as has been stated, the cyclas and the quilted gambeson and haqueton, in conjunction with the chain-mail hauberk, were especially favored by English knights during the second quarter of the fourteenth century. Armor of this sort was worn by a large number of romance heroes. In *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*, eleven of the Twelve Peers are shown assisting Roland to don haqueton and hauberk:

Eleven duspers stode hym by
To arme sir Rowlande full hastyly,
þat prouede was in Batayle.
An actone thay threwe appon hym hye
And ane hawberke sekerly,
þat sekire was of Mayle.¹⁹

King Clariel, Roland's opponent in the duel he was about to fight, was likewise equipped with haqueton and hauberk.²⁰ Gray Steele and the Red Knight in the romance *Sir Perceval of Gales* are other heroes who wore a haqueton under the hauberk.²¹ The gambeson worn by Guy of Warwick is mentioned more than once,²² and, in the romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Richard is said to have worn haqueton, hauberk, plate, and gambeson in a tournament:

Such a stroke he hym lente
That Rycharde feet out of his steropes wente;
For plate, ne for acketton,
For hawberke, ne for campeson,

¹⁷ Ed. James Ralston Caldwell, *Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature*, IX (Cambridge [Mass.], 1933), Percy MS., vv. 1086-88.

¹⁸ *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, ed. Paul Meyer, *Société de l'Histoire de France* (Paris, 1891-1901), v. 311.

¹⁹ In *The English Charlemagne Romances*, Part II, ed. Sidney J. Herrtage, *EETS*, XXXV (1880), vv. 349-54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vv. 1189-1200.

²¹ *Eger and Grime*, ed. cit., Huntington MS., v. 1517; *Sir Perceval of Gales*, ed. J. Campion and F. Holthausen, *Alt- und mittellenglische Texte*, V (Heidelberg, 1913), v. 1102.

²² *Guy of Warwick*, ed. cit., Auchinleck MS., st. 93, v. 7, and st. 118, v. 4.

Suche a stroke he neuer had none ore
That dyde hym halfe so moche sore.²³

Instead of the haqueton, one occasionally finds the romance knight wearing the somewhat later jupon over his hauberk. The jupon appears to have been a sleeveless, padded tunic, made of silk, velvet, or leather, decorated in various ways, and laced tightly over the hauberk.²⁴ In the terrible duel between Arthur and Modred described in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, it is stated that King Arthur wore the jupon:

The ffelonne with þe ffyne swerde freschely he strykes,
The ffelettes of þe fferrere syde he flassches in sondyre
Thorowe jopowne and jesserawnte of gentille mailes!²⁵

The word "jesserawnte" refers to the composition of the king's hauberk. Jazeraint-work was made of two layers of leather or fabric between which steel links were sewed.²⁶ In reality, jazeraint-work was a form of chain-mail, and it was used both for hauberks and leg protectors ("Hose of Hawberke Gesseraunte"²⁷) indefinitely early. The knights in *Sir Degrevant*, it might be noted, also wore jupons over jazeraint hauberks:

doghety sir degrevant
lays þe Erle on þe launde
Thorow Japone and Jesserant
he lamed þaire knyghttes.²⁸

iv. The cumbersome composite armor worn by Richard, Roland, and other heroes was superseded by splinted armor which has been described. A very few instances of this mid-fourteenth century style of body armor may be found in the romances. In *Guy of Warwick*, the Danish giant, Colbrond, seems to have been equipped with splinted armor:

Of mailes was nouzt his hauberk:
It was al of anoper werk,
þat meruail is to here.
Alle it were þicke splentes of stiel,
þicke y-ioined strong & wel,
To kepe þat fendes fere.
Hossen he hadde also wele y wrouzt;

²³ *Ed. cit.*, vv. 373-78.

²⁴ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, p. 100-01.

²⁵ *Ed. cit.*, vv. 4237-39.

²⁶ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²⁷ *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne, ed. cit.*, v. 355.

²⁸ Ed. Karl Luick, *Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie*, XLVIII (Wien und Leipzig, 1917), Thornton MS., vv. 305-08.

Oþer þan splentes was it nouȝt
 Fram his fot to his swere.²⁹

The word "splents" also occurs in *Eger and Grime*, but its meaning there is uncertain.³⁰

v. The latter part of the fourteenth century saw the beginnings of a new type of armor. Instead of encasing their bodies either in chain-mail reinforced in various ways, or in the stifling gambeson and haque-ton, the knights wore steel plates that were curved to conform to the body. With time, the skill of armorers with respect to jointing and shaping the plates increased, until even the gauntlets and foot protectors (sollerets) of the knight were fashioned of steel. Plate-armor came to be used almost exclusively in the fifteenth century, but in the romances there seem to be no descriptions of the beautiful suits of cunningly jointed plate one usually thinks of when mediaeval armor is mentioned. Nevertheless, one occasionally finds allusions to certain pieces of plate-armor. Gray Steele, for example, wore steel gauntlets:

And then he came right soon again,
 Where that the knight was lying slain:
 And then his right hand off he took,
 Syne in a glove of plate it shook.³¹

The sleeve of a plate hauberk seems to be described in the following passage from *Morte Arthure*:

An alet enamelde he oches in sondire,
 Bristed þe rerebrace with the bronde ryche,
 Kerves of at þe couterie with þe clene egge
 Anetes þe avawmbrace, vrayllede with silver!
 Thorowe a dowble vesture of velvett ryche,
 With þe venymous swerde a vayne has he towchede!³²

In his duel with Gawain, Priamus knocked off one of his opponent's aillettes and one of his elbow protectors, and split open both his rerebrace and vambrace, penetrating the velvet sleeve and inflicting a

²⁹ *Ed. cit.*, Auchinleck MS., st. 256, vv. 1-9.

³⁰ *Ed. cit.*, Percy MS., v. 959.

³¹ *Eger and Grime, ed. cit.*, Huntington MS., vv. 1639-42.

³² *Ed. cit.*, vv. 2565-70. The "alet" or ailette was an auxiliary guard-plate that was affixed to the shoulder of the hauberk to protect the neck; Gawain's aillettes were evidently made of enameled steel. The "rerebrace," from French *arrière-bras*, was that part of the plate sleeve that covered the upper arm. The "couterie," from French *coudière*, was the part of the plate sleeve that protected the elbow, covering the gap between the rerebrace and the vambrace. The "avawmbrace" or vambrace, from French *avant-bras*, was the lower part of the plate sleeve.

wound, probably on the forearm. This passage, it would seem, could refer only to the various parts of the sleeve of a plate hauberk. None of the other warriors in *Morte Arthure*, however, were clad in plate armor.

Of the several types of body armor discussed here, it appears that the heroes of romance were most frequently attired either in rather vaguely described chain-mail, sometimes of the reinforced variety, or in the composite armor of the first half of the fourteenth century. A few hints of the later plate-armor may be found, but they are definitely exceptional.

The second most important part of the knight's protective equipment—the helm—underwent few changes. The conical steel cap of the Normans with its metal nasal guard, as pictured in the Bayeux Tapestry,³³ was used in England till about 1200, when it was superseded by the pot-*heaume* or cylindrical helm that, resting on the shoulders, covered the head, face, and neck completely. The pot-*heaume* was refined in later years by the addition of a movable ventail or visor, and was sometimes surmounted by a crest. In the reign of Edward III, a lighter form of head-gear—the basinet—was often used, but the great helm continued to be worn in battle and tournament. Under the helm, the knight usually wore a steel cap probably lined with wool; and sometimes a chain-mail coif covered the head as well. Occasionally the steel cap worn under the helm was called a basinet.³⁴

The knight's headgear is rarely described in the Middle English romances, although both of the most common forms, helms and basinets, are mentioned frequently.³⁵ Sometimes, as in *Beues of Hamtoun*,³⁶ the terms, helm and basinet, are used to denote the outer head protector, but in another passage in the same romance "bacinet" designates the steel cap worn under the helm:

þe dragoun harde him gan asail
& smot on þe helm with his taile,
þat his helm cleuede ato,
And his bacinet dede also.³⁷

³³ *Ed. cit.*, plates XIX, XXI, XXIII, XXIV, etc.

³⁴ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29, 42-45, 60-66, 74-75, 82-84, 97-100, 109. For illustrations see Laking, *op. cit.*

³⁵ *Sir Degrevant*, *ed. cit.*, Cambridge MS., vv. 341-44, and v. 1635.

³⁶ Ed. Eugen Kölbing, *EETSES*, XLVI, XLVIII, LXV (1885, 1886, 1894), v. 1464.

³⁷ *Ed. cit.*, vv. 2845-48.

The visor of the helm is often alluded to as is the lacing of the ventail before battle. For example, the eleven peers who armed Roland for his duel

Broghte hym ane helme of bettant,
& lacede his auentale.³⁸

Passages according to the helm a more detailed treatment are not to be found in the English poems. One is particularly surprised to note that the Middle English poets missed the opportunity of describing the gaudy heraldic crests which often surmounted the helms worn in the fifteenth century.

The third article of defensive equipment—the shield—was, in its early form, a large kite-shaped wooden protector curved slightly and running to a length of perhaps four and a half feet. Straps on the reverse side permitted the knight to bear the shield on his left arm. The large Norman shield gave way to a smaller heater-shaped type during the latter part of the fourteenth century, when improved body armor made this form of protection less vital. After the introduction of plate-armor, the shield does not seem to have been needed; nevertheless, small shields were affixed to the left shoulder of tournament armor, because it was at the knight's left side that the tilting opponent aimed his lance. It should be noted that the earliest heraldic bearings appeared on the shields of thirteenth-century knights.³⁹

It is scarcely necessary to speak of the shield as it is represented in the romances. Except when the poets were interested in depicting the heraldic cognizances painted thereon,⁴⁰ they did little more than mention this piece of defensive equipment.

Because it was of prime importance for the knight to keep his horse under him in battle or tournament, defensive armor for the charger, or *destrier*, was used rather early. In the time of Edward I chain-mail and quilted pads protected the horse from lance thrusts and sword

³⁸ *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*, ed. *cit.*, vv. 356-57. The meaning of "bettant" is obscure.

³⁹ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30, 48-49, 75-76, 106-07. Even on the shields depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry there are designs which might later have developed into heraldic bearings. *Ed. cit.*, especially plate LXXIV. A discussion of armorial bearings on shields may be found in Francis A. Barnard, "Heraldry," in *Medieval England*, ed. H. W. C. Davis (Oxford, 1924), pp. 201-02.

⁴⁰ King Arthur, for example, hung a shield decorated with armorial bearings around the neck of Libeaus Desconus on the occasion of the knighting of the young hero. *Libeaus Desconus*, ed. *cit.*, vv. 85-93.

blows, and during the fifteenth century plate-armor shaped to cover head, face, breast, and rump appeared.⁴¹ As is well known, the chargers used by knights in warfare and in the tournament lists were of a large breed especially developed to carry tremendous weight.⁴²

Despite the military importance of the horse, equine armor is not noticed in the romances. On the other hand, the war horse, like Rocinante, sometimes plays a definite rôle in the plot of the romance and is given a full set of character traits and a name.

Among the knight's weapons, the sword was undoubtedly the most effective, and it underwent slight change throughout the feudal age. In general, the sword was pointed, two-edged, and cross-hilted, and its blade was about thirty inches in length. It could be used for thrusting, cutting, or simply for striking.⁴³ Battering at the helm or neck armor of one's opponent with the sword must have been a favored technique of warriors in close combat. During the fourteenth century, two-handed swords made their appearance. These weapons had a blade sometimes as long as fifty inches, and the grip was long enough to permit the use of both hands so that great sweeping blows could be delivered. The hand-and-half or bastard sword, likewise coming into use during the fourteenth century, had a forty-inch blade and could be wielded with one or with both hands. These great swords were not much used in England, it seems, but they acquired some popularity in Scotland, where they were called claymores.⁴⁴

In the romances, the sword is never pictured, but the ancient custom of ascribing great virtues to old weapons is sometimes observed. Both Roland and Guy of Warwick fight with antique swords; that of the latter, in fact, was once the property of none other than Hector of Troy.⁴⁵ The rather unusual two-handed sword, it should be noted, appears in *Sir Degrevant*. The hero is waylaid when on his way to his lady's

⁴¹ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-99. In later feudal times, the devising of armor for the *destrier* was an advanced art, and each piece of equine armor had its particular name. For example, the steel cap protecting the horse's head was called the tester. See the author's article "Testiere: *Knight's Tale*, 2499," *Modern Language Notes*, XLIX (1934), 397-400.

⁴² There is a discussion of the use of the horse in mediaeval warfare in George T. Denison's *A History of Cavalry from the Earliest Times: With Lessons for the Future*, 2nd. ed., London, 1913.

⁴³ Ashdown, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 107-08.

⁴⁴ C. H. Ashdown, *British and Foreign Arms and Armour* (London and Edinburgh, 1909), pp. 336-37. See also Walter Meller, *A Knight's Life in the Days of Chivalry* (London, 1924), p. 74.

⁴⁵ *Guy of Warwick*, ed. cit., Auchinleck MS., st. 93, v. 2.

bower, and he hews a way through his enemies with this weapon :

With his twohand-swerde
he made swylk pay,
þat ffourty lay in þe felde
bothe with spere and with schelde.⁴⁶

Again, in *the Squyr of Lowe Degre*, the hero is said to have wielded "a baslarde large and longe."⁴⁷ A "baslarde" is a short sword or dagger, a meaning which is in ill accord with the adjectives "large and longe." An alternate reading of "baslarde," however, is "bastarde," and one is perhaps justified in supposing that the hand-and-half or bastard sword is here referred to by the poet.

The lance, second in importance among the knight's weapons, consisted of a heavy wooden staff ranging in length from five to ten or twelve feet. Its use was generally restricted to fighting on horseback.⁴⁸ With his lance held firmly under his right arm and aimed across his horse's neck, the knight would spur his mount toward an opponent, striving to unseat him by a blow on the breast, helm, or right shoulder, and simultaneously he would attempt to avoid or parry a direct thrust from the other's lance. The lance used in serious warfare was usually rather short and heavy and provided with a sharp iron point. The longer lance used in tournaments, however, was often tipped with a coronal rather than a point, and the shaft was sometimes of hollow construction so that it might be readily shattered. In tilting, the knight took great pride in retaining his saddle even when his adversary's lance splintered against his shield or his breast.⁴⁹

Romance writers speak often enough of the lance or "spere," but seldom is the reader told more about this weapon than that it was

A schafft wrougt off trusty werk.⁵⁰

In a passage in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, however, the measurements of an immense lance wielded by the king was given :

He bare a shafte that was grete and stronge,
It was fourtene fote long;

⁴⁶ *Ed. cit.*, Thornton MS., vv. 1659-62.

⁴⁷ *Ed. William E. Mead* (Boston and New York, 1904), v. 1013.

⁴⁸ The uses to which the lance could be put are well illustrated in the Bayeux Tapestry. *Ed. cit.*, plates LVI, LVIII, LXI, LXII, etc.

⁴⁹ Ashdown, *Armour and Weapons in the Middle Ages*, pp. 31, 108, 126-27.

⁵⁰ *Richard Coer de Lyon, ed. cit.*, v. 5708. Sometimes the lance is called a "spere," as in *Torrent of Portyngale, EETSSES*, LI (1887), v. 2470.

And it was both grete and stoute,
One and twenty inches aboute.⁵¹

Even though this incredibly great lance was tipped with a coronal (v. 297) rather than a sharp point, Richard did a vast amount of damage to his adversaries. A coroneled lance also appears in *Libeaus Desconus*.⁵² The mention of the coronal, and the frequency with which lances are splintered in the romances suggest that the writers usually had in mind the hollow, lightly constructed tournament lance rather than a formidable, iron-pointed weapon of war.

Other weapons were used by historical knights, particularly the short-hafted axe, the mace in different forms, and the misericorde, a dagger usually worn on the right hip.⁵³ Dismounted knights seem occasionally to have fought with pole-axe, guisarme, or pike, but such rude pole-weapons were commonly reserved for the infantry.⁵⁴

Sometimes the romance knight is also represented as being equipped with axe or mace. In *Guy of Warwick*, Herhaud "so sore" swings with a "damsax" that he slays more than sixty Saracens,⁵⁵ and it is with an axe that Sir Guy dispatches the terrible giant Colbrond.⁵⁶ In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, King Richard is pictured reeling under a vicious blow from a brass mace.⁵⁷ In *Eger and Grime*, the accoutrements of Gray Steele are given considerable attention, and the knight's mace is described thus:

A mase of gold full royallie,
on the top stooode a Carbunkle bright,
it shoone as Moone dothe in the night.⁵⁸

The poet wishes his readers to believe that this golden-shafted mace had a luminous carbuncle, a fabulous mediaeval gem,⁵⁹ for a head. The

⁵¹ *Ed. cit.*, vv. 285-88.

⁵² *Ed. cit.*, v. 987.

⁵³ Illustrations of axes, maces, and other weapons are to be found in Ashdown, *Armour and Weapons in the Middle Ages*, pp. 192-3.

⁵⁴ See illustrations in Ashdown, *Armour and Weapons in the Middle Ages*, pp. 129-34.

⁵⁵ *Ed. cit.*, Auchinleck MS., vv. 3585-89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Auchinleck MS., st. 267-69.

⁵⁷ *Ed. cit.*, vv. 371-72.

⁵⁸ *Ed. cit.*, Percy MS., vv. 968-70.

⁵⁹ Luminosity is a mythological property of the carbuncle which mediaeval writers seldom fail to mention. The stone is described in the lapidaries, of course, and also appears in many literary pieces. The luminous "carboucle" is mentioned in Chaucer's *The Hous of Fame*, v. 1363, and in the Middle English translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose* (often attributed to Chaucer), vv. 1119-24.

pole-axe also appears several times in the hands of romance knights. A threat twice muttered by King Richard is

And yf the dogge wyll come to me,
My pollaxe shall his bane be.⁶⁰

In *Sir Degrevant*, a wicked pole-weapon called the glaive is used in tournament fighting:

Glayues gleterand pay glent
On gleterand scheldys.⁶¹

The bow, another weapon traditionally used only by footmen, is nevertheless of great importance in the history of mediaeval warfare. Three forms of the bow were used during the feudal age. The short-bow, the earliest of these, was perhaps three feet long and was drawn to the chest. Its use is amply illustrated in the Bayeux Tapestry.⁶² The cross-bow, or arbalest, was much stiffer than the short-bow, but it was mounted on a barrel or stock, so that it might be cocked by a lever, small windlass, or other mechanical device. The cross-bow shot bolts or quarrels with considerable force and accuracy, and in the thirteenth century was held to be a terrible weapon.⁶³ The Welsh long-bow⁶⁴ was five or six feet in length and was drawn to the ear. This weapon was introduced into England during the reign of Edward I and came to supplant not only the short-bow, but, to a large extent, the cross-bow as well, when it was learned that English archers could find weak joints even in a suit of mail with their cloth-yard shafts. The advantages of the long-bow over the arbalest lay in the fact that it could be discharged much more rapidly, and in its equal if not greater range and accuracy. It was by a judicious combination of archers and dismounted men-at-arms that the English won the battles of Dupplin (1332) and Halidon Hill (1333) against the Scots, and the same tactics were responsible

⁶⁰ *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ed. cit., vv. 6941-42. See also v. 6814.

⁶¹ *Ed. cit.*, vv. 295-96.

⁶² *Ed. cit.*, plates XLI, XLIII, etc.

⁶³ For illustrations and a discussion of the arbalest, see Laking, *op. cit.*, I, 126.

⁶⁴ One of the earliest notices of the long-bow is to be found in a highly interesting passage in the *Itinerarium Cambriae* of Giraldus Cambrensis (Lib. I, cap. 4). Ed. J. F. Dimock, "Rolls Series" (London, 1861-91), VI, 54.

Sir Charles Oman, in his *History of the Art of War* (New York and London, 1898), p. 559, note 1, refers to another passage in the *Itinerarium* (Lib. II, cap. 5) for a description of the Welsh long-bow. Here, however, Professor Oman seems to be in error, for the phrase "in modum arcis acutissimos," the sole reference to a bow in this chapter, is quite clearly meant to be descriptive of the contour of the Welsh mountains.

for the victories of Crécy and Poitiers.⁶⁵ In fact, the long-bow, like gunpowder,⁶⁶ played no inconsiderable part in lessening the age-long military supremacy of the knight, and thus, in contributing to the downfall of the feudal régime.

The fact that the bow was *par excellence* the mark of the humble foot soldier is well respected in the romances, but a conspicuous exception is found in the royal knight, King Richard:

Richard bente an arweblast off vys,
And schotte it to a tour fful euene
And it smot þorwȝ Sarezynes seuene.⁶⁷

Although archers and cross-bowmen or arbalesters are mentioned time and again in the English poems, Richard seems to be the only romance knight who used the bow in battle.

III

To summarize the foregoing observations: With respect to body armor, it has been shown that certain heroes of romance are attired in chain-mail or reinforced chain-mail, and in the padded composite armor of the early part of the fourteenth century. The splinted style of armor of a somewhat later date is very rarely represented, and, although fifteenth-century plate-armor is suggested from time to time by the mention of steel gauntlets or of a plate sleeve, it is nowhere fully described. It may be said, then, that romance knights are traditionally depicted as wearing the body armor which was popular in England during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

The other important features of the knight's defensive equipment—the helm and shield—are by no means well portrayed, and armor for the *destrier* does not appear.

Swords, even the uncommon two-handed and hand-and-half varieties, are spoken of in accounts of battles, duels, and tournaments; but the romance poets are never at pains to include satisfactory descriptions.

⁶⁵ Oman, *op. cit.*, pp. 583-634.

⁶⁶ The English are said to have used cannon at Crécy, but the bombards of the fourteenth century do not seem to have possessed notable destructive power. Gustav Köhler, *Die Entwicklung des Kriegswesens und der Kriegführung in der Ritterzeit von Mitte des 11. Jahrhunderts bis zu den Hussitenkriegen* (Breslau, 1886-89), III, Teil I, pp. 215-62.

Frissart refers to cannon several times in his *Chroniques*, even speaking of their use on ships of war. *Chroniques*, ed. Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove (Bruxelles, 1867-77), IX, 70-71; X, 22; and XII, 70-72. Illustrations of these early cannon may be found in Köhler, *op. cit.*, III, Teil 1, Tafeln 2, 3, 4, and 5.

⁶⁷ *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ed. *cit.*, vv. 3998-4000.

The lance is likewise mentioned frequently, but the exact character of this weapon is usually left to the reader's imagination, and the same is true of the axe and the mace. One must make allowance, of course, for such monstrosities and curiosities as King Richard's lance and Sir Gray Steele's jewelled mace, which are rather fully depicted. With few exceptions, romance knights are never shown using the weapons commonly reserved for the humble foot-soldiery, such as the bow and the pole-axe.

One concludes, then, that although the Middle English romance poets are obliged, by the kind of tales they relate, to allude constantly to arms and armor, they seldom reveal much knowledge of a technical nature about mediaeval military equipment. In most instances, weapons or particular pieces of armor are referred to only by name, or else they are described in stock phrases that tell one little or nothing about their composition or appearance. On the other hand, isolated passages occur in some romances in which armor and weapons are given a genuine descriptive treatment. One could scarcely turn to these passages as sources of reliable information on such matters as tournament lances or two-handed swords; yet it seems clear that the writers of romance,⁶⁸ on the infrequent occasions when they choose to portray with some degree of clarity the armor and weapons with which their heroes are provided, draw upon their observation of the contemporaneous military scene.⁶⁹ In other words, because the more satisfactory descriptions of the knight's equipment correspond to articles of warfare in actual use at some time during the later Middle Ages, the terms 'imaginative' or 'fanciful' may not be correctly applied to the treatment accorded this phase of mediaeval life in the English romances.

⁶⁸ It must, of course, be realized that the versions in which most of the Middle English romances have come down to us are many times removed from their original composers, most of whom wrote in Old French. Rather than to one poet, the composition of almost every Middle English romance must be ascribed to several literary men working sometimes at widely separated periods. Hence, it is not surprising that in *Eger and Grime*, *Guy of Warwick*, and some other poems, one finds descriptions of armor worn by actual knights during two different periods. This consideration does not impair the conclusions of the present study, since the question here is whether mediaeval armor of whatever decade is clearly described in the romances.

⁶⁹ The romance poets sometimes speak of a mace made of jewels and precious metal or of "geldene scheldus," probably to suggest the wealth and splendor of their heroes. When one considers that ceremonial arms and armor were frequently composed of rich materials, he can see that to describe military equipment in such terms required no very great stretch of the imagination on the part of mediaeval writers. Truly fanciful descriptions are very rare indeed. An example is the absurd outfit—consisting of two hauberks, two helmets, and a 'double shield'—with which Berard provided himself for his duel with the formidable Guy of Warwick. *Guy of Warwick*, ed. cit., Auchinleck MS., st. 187.

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